United Nations E/CN.5/2010/NGO/15

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 November 2009

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Forty-eighth session
3-12 February 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Statement submitted by the Alulbayt Foundation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

"The relevance of spirituality for the social integration of youths"

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Statement

1. The priority theme of the forty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development is "social integration" and its provisional agenda includes a deliberation on the World Programme of Action for Youth. The Economic and Social Council has a stated aim to promote gender equality and foster social integration for social groups, such as youth, persons with disabilities, and older persons, as well as migrants and indigenous peoples. The Alulbayt Foundation's research department, the Centre for Islamic Shi'a Studies, hereby offers a working solution, based on spirituality to reduce problems of drugs and violence and to restore a sense of stable social integration in the lives of the young.

2. The organization was interested in the statement of the *World Youth Report 2005* that "many young people are exploring their sexuality, and for some this exploration has certain embedded risks. Some youth experiment with drugs or venture into some type of delinquency, mostly of a temporary duration. These transitional risks have not changed much through the generations, and they remain of primary concern to most young people today". It is the view of the Alulbayt

* E/CN.5/2010/1

09-62316 (E) 151209

Please recycle

Foundation that these problems must first be seen in the light of the motivations and desires that had young people resort to such risks, which lead to social disintegration. This is a decidedly spiritual question.

Spirituality

3. By spirituality we do not merely mean a theological or worship-based spirituality. We advocate a wider definition of spirituality that is ethical, psychological and focused on understanding the "self" and one's "personhood". This is based on the philosophy of 'Ali ibn Abī Tālib (the first Shi'a Imam, son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad) who said: "He who truly knows himself has known his Lord".[1] Arguably, the idea behind this narration is to emphasize journeying within oneself to understand one's origin. Aside from the issue of belief, what is significant here is acquiring an inner sense of the worth of one's character. This is crucial to prevent the social disorders that lead to crime, moral apathy, depression and a lack of direction in life.

4. Zayn Al-'Ābidīn (the fourth Shi'a Imam and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) uniquely stated that even our organs have rights: "your hands and stomach have rights".[2] The deeper meaning behind this is to foster greater responsibility in human beings to be aware of actions they commit against themselves and each other.

5. In fact, the potential of spirituality has been elucidated by various scholars, including Puchalski, who states, "Spirituality can be defined as whomever or whatever gives one a transcendent meaning in life". This is often expressed through religion or as a relationship with God, but it can also refer to other things: nature, energy, force, belief in the good of all and belief in the importance of family and community.

6. The spirit is the essence of the person, what makes him or her unique.[3] Hay builds on such definitions and believes health-care staff can diagnose spiritual suffering in the following categories:

(a) "Spiritual suffering: interpersonal and/or intra-psychic anguish of unspecified origin;

(b) Inner resource deficiency: diminished spiritual capacity;

(c) Belief system problem: lack of awareness of one's personal system of meaning;

(d) Religious request: a specifically expressed religious request".[4]

7. In our research into United Nations policies and reports, we did not find much deliberation on how the self, that is, a person's identity, personality and self-consciousness, can contribute to social isolation and displacement within a society. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond identified

[1] ReyShahri, Muhammad Muhammadi, *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol. 6, 142, No. 11923, reported from Ghurar al-Hikam.

[2] Chittick, W., *Al-Saheefa Al-Sajjadiyyah* (The Psalms of Islam), Ansariyan Publications.

[3] Puchalski, Christina M., Center to Improve Care of the Dying, George Washington University School of Medicine (October 1999).

[4] Hay, M. W., *Principles in building spiritual assessment tools*, American Journal of Hospice Care (1989), 6: 25-31.

10 priority areas to improve the situation and well-being of a youth: education; employment; hunger and poverty; health; environment; drug abuse; juvenile delinquency; leisure time activities; girls and young women; and full and effective participation of youths in the life of society and decision-making.[5] None of these areas, however, emphasized how youth feel within their employment or environment. Or what leads a young person to an impoverished state. Is it because he/she is internally unhappy? Is it because he/she has not found any inner contentment and direction in his/her life? For the Alulbayt Foundation, these are crucial questions which come before the 10 priority areas listed.

Conclusion

8. In conclusion, the Alulbayt Foundation's research department, the Centre for Islamic Shi'a Studies, proposes a practical application of spirituality in a young person's life by recommending that:

(a) Schools and community centres adopt classes that promote techniques of "self-reflection" and "personal awareness through discussion". Just as society has included sports as a fundamental lesson to promote fitness of the body, we believe society now needs to consider the fitness of the mind and heart;

(b) The Alulbayt Foundation is committed in supporting such endeavours and does so in its activities. We have set up a Saturday school for youths in our local area to improve their education and well-being. We have also supported the establishment of schools in Africa and the Middle East, in particular in Iraq, through our international branches. We request the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations departments to support such activities.

[5] General Assembly resolution 50/81, annex.